

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

DEVELOPING AIR FORCE STRATEGISTS:  
A PLAN, INSTEAD OF AD HOC HOPES

by

Rondall R. Rice, Colonel, USAF

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## Biography

Colonel Rondall Rice graduated from the USAF Academy in 1989, earned his Master's degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and holds a doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His degrees are in American, European, and military history. He has led intelligence units in NATO, CENTAF, and PACAF, working with fighter units and at Combined Air Operation Centers. Colonel Rice has provided direct combat intelligence support during Operations DESERT SHIELD, DESERT STORM, PROVIDE PROMISE, DENY FLIGHT, ENDURING FREEDOM, and IRAQI FREEDOM. Colonel Rice has taught twice at the United States Air Force Academy, and served as Associate Dean and Acting Dean of the National Defense Intelligence College. Prior to attending Air War College, he was the Chief of Analysis Transformation for the Directorate of Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Strategy, Plans, Doctrine, and Force Development (A2D), under the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Washington, D.C.

Colonel Rice has several works in publication, most recently, *The Politics of Air Power: From Confrontation to Cooperation in Army Aviation Civil-Military Relations*. He also wrote an essay published in the journal *War in History* and subsequently included in *The Bombing of Auschwitz: Should the Allies Have Attempted It?*

*"If the mind is to emerge unscathed from this relentless struggle with the unforeseen, two qualities are indispensable: first, an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of inner light which leads to truth; and second, the courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead."* Carl von Clausewitz<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 102.

## Introduction

The current demand in the Department of Defense (DoD) for better strategists and better strategic planning probably predates the establishment of the first military academies and general staffs. Studies, theses, books, and newspaper quotes offer a plethora of evidence over decades expounding on this vital requirement. In the wake of strategic miscalculations in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the resultant outcry has increased in the United States, perhaps best summarized by a recent report that began, "The ability of the US national security establishment to craft, implement, and adapt effective long-term strategies against intelligent adversaries at acceptable costs has been declining for some decades."<sup>2</sup>

Although the call for strategists is not new, the United States Air Force (USAF) has not taken concrete steps to ensure that it develops and sustains a cadre of strategy specialists. In 1982, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General David C. Jones (USAF) called for "the development of a corps of strategic military thinkers." He believed the military needed these specialists, but did not develop them to handle future challenges.<sup>3</sup> Almost thirty years later, the USAF has still not developed a cadre of specialized strategists. In the face of diverse and rapidly-emerging threats in an age of globalization, the U.S. and the USAF no longer have the luxury of talented strategists emerging by happenstance from outdated personnel development systems. The Air Force continues to assume that a normal career development and military educational assignments will produce officers who can serve in positions requiring strategic thinking. To truly develop strategists--and have them stay in uniform and serve at the most senior ranks--the USAF must commit to a cultural change regarding how it views the career path

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich and Barry D. Watts, *Regaining Strategic Competence* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2009), vii.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Halloran, "Retiring Chief Speaks Out on Military Council," *New York Times*, 25 February 1982.

to senior leadership. The service must implement a strategist career specialty with deliberately planned and tracked career development programs.

### **A History of Ad-Hoc Strategists**

Early air service leaders did not identify a need for strategic thinking regarding national security, national policies, or grand strategy, but they did understand the need for a military education system that produced officers who could nominally serve in these emerging roles. The first separate (Air Service) school, the "Air Service Field Officer's School," focused on the tactical application of air power in theory and practice.<sup>4</sup> The school began to change its curriculum in 1924, and by 1928 (then renamed the Air Corps Tactical School, or ACTS) the instruction focused upon what air power could do, if put to the proper use. In 1935, the school redesignated the Department of Air Tactics as the Department of Tactics and Strategy. The principle course on the air forces, which became the capstone course of instruction, initially included employment and command of air power and staff work. The faculty continued to develop both the course and their thoughts on the employment of air power, and the course eventually became one where the faculty and students examined and developed theories on the strategic impact of air power in war. The official history of ACTS called this course the school's most important.<sup>5</sup>

In the latter part of the interwar period and the last years of ACTS, the school served as the Air Corps' doctrine center. The service used the faculty and students as a sounding board for ideas and a forum to investigate and develop air doctrine. Students thought broadly and deeply about the nature and philosophy of war, and the airplane's role in warfare, but their ideas were

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<sup>4</sup> Robert T. Finney, *History of the Air Corps Tactical School, 1920-1940* (1955; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Air Force History and Museum Program, 1998), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Finney, *History of the Air Corps Tactical School*, 36-37.



"rooted in their faith" in air power.<sup>6</sup> Under the leadership of Colonel John F. Curry, the school's curriculum changed from studying the first air prophets to examining the application of the air arm to obtain military objectives--although they did so using only the tactical concept of high altitude bombing. Students then turned the tactical doctrine into strategic applications and doctrines they thought would achieve national policy objectives.<sup>7</sup> At that time, the U.S. government did not formally define or clearly describe its national policy (in a manner familiar to us today, like the National Security Strategy), but prior to American entry into World War II military planners did meet with the British and established "strategic guidelines" for the employment of American forces, should they be needed.<sup>8</sup> The school did not set about to train "strategists," but were they doing so? The students did study war and theorized and planned for a future and important--if not essential and predominant--role for airplanes.

After World War II, the Air Force established Air University (AU) as the successor to ACTS and, echoing the ACTS mission, the new school would "equip officers with the knowledge and skill necessary for assuming progressively more important assignments in command and staff positions through the Air Force."<sup>9</sup> The new educational entity did not mention the need for strategists; instead AU sought to train senior commanders and staff officers--arguably the same role it serves in the present. A 1963 student thesis by Army Major Angelo Siracuse discussed the need for a strategic discipline and education of USAF officers. He summarized how the Air Force (and the other services) taught strategy: assign readings; present major (academic) disciplinary dimensions of a problem area; apply the newly-acquired knowledge and the

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<sup>6</sup> Finney, *History of the Air Corps Tactical School*, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Major General Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., *The Strategic Air War Against Germany and Japan: A Memoir* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1986), 7-11.

<sup>8</sup> Hansell, *The Strategic Air War Against Germany and Japan*, 25-29. The British-American meetings became known as ABC-1 and the American air planning resulting from those meetings became AWPD-1, which served as the basic blueprint for the resulting air war.

<sup>9</sup> Finney, *History of the Air Corps Tactical School*, 84.

students' experiences in the seminar to strategy formulation.<sup>10</sup> Air University uses the same basic model over forty years later and produces officers with an education in strategic concepts who could serve as strategists, but are not the highly educated and specifically developed specialists the Air Force needs. A recent article by four USAF officers supports this contention and adds that the service thinks that it *is* educating strategist-leaders, but its curriculum is not focused upon the correct skills. Additionally, they contend that the officers selected to attend professional military education (PME) are not selected for their cognitive acumen and the PME system is not intellectually rigorous, with attendance viewed as a mere "rite of passage."<sup>11</sup>

The Air Force attempted to fill the strategic-intellectual gap with the establishment of the School of Advanced Airpower (later Air and Space Power) Studies (SAASS) in 1990. Air Force Chief of Staff General Larry Welch believed the military education system did not provide the necessary intellectual challenges to produce future strategists. The system at the time produced those who articulated doctrine to "protect the equity of airpower" and lacked substance based in understanding war and warfare.<sup>12</sup> SAASS's mission is to "produce strategists through advanced education in the art and science of air, space, and cyberspace power to defend the United States and protect its interests."<sup>13</sup> Yet, according to Dr. Stephen Chiabotti, SAASS's Chief Academic Officer and former Vice Commandant, how the USAF uses and assigns SAASS graduates "is

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<sup>10</sup> Major Angelo J. Siracuse, USA, "On Strategy and Strategists: The Search for a Discipline" (Thesis, Air Command and Staff College, 15 April 1963), 54.

<sup>11</sup> Brigadier General Scott A. Bethel et al., "Developing Air Force Strategists: Change Culture, Reverse Careerism," *Joint Force Quarterly* 58 (3d Quarter, July 2010), n.p., (accessed online), <http://www.ndu.edu/press/air-force-strategists.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Harold D. Winton, "The Creation and Sustainment of Advanced Warfighting Institutions" (paper presented at the Rowell Advanced Warfighting Seminar, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, Australia, 17 July 2003), 7.

<sup>13</sup> School of Advanced Air and Space Studies Home Page, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/saass/index.asp>.

reinvented each year" but the "ad hocery" has worked well and is flexible, despite three times the number of requests as there are annual graduates.<sup>14</sup>

A more recent study by a SAASS graduate attempted to determine more specifically how the USAF utilized SAASS graduates--450 Air Force officers by 2009. If one looks at the Air Staff's instructions guiding the assignment of these officers, the first two prioritized categories are "return to operations" and "direct hire" assignments.<sup>15</sup> Three tiers of assignments followed the first two: "Critical strategy and operational planning positions" (Tier 1); and then "essential" and "other" strategy jobs (Tiers 2 and 3).<sup>16</sup> However, the author indicated that 73% of SAASS graduates filled a position "validated" for these newly-minted "strategists," with 27% returning to operations or some other type of assignment.<sup>17</sup> Slightly under 35% of the graduates have served multiple validated billets, but over 13% had yet to serve in any validated billet.<sup>18</sup> The thesis used statistics provided for "validated" billets, but did not delve into how the officers were actually utilized and the jobs they performed.

SAASS does provide a pool of specially-educated officers, but Major Jones's conclusion that SAASS has used its graduates "to its strategic advantage" remains very subjective and based mainly upon reputation, requests for its graduates, and the numbers of general officers.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, while SAASS produces excellent officers, the demand for them is higher than the output, and the students are still intellectually incubated within the PME system. The 2010

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen D. Chiabotti, "A Deeper Shade of Blue: The School of Advanced Air and Space Studies," *Joint Force Quarterly* 49 (2d Quarter, 2008), 76 (accessed online), <https://digitalndulibrary.ndu.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/ndupress&CISOPTR=20482&REC=11>.

<sup>15</sup> "Direct hire" assignments include commander positions, director of operations, or chief of safety. See AF/A1 Memorandum, "Assignment Utilization Guidance for Advanced Study Group (ASG) Graduates," 23 February 2007, quoted in Sean S. Jones, "Whither SAASS and Its Graduates" (Master's Thesis, The School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, June 2009), 50.

<sup>16</sup> Jones, "Whither SAASS and Its Graduates," 50.

<sup>17</sup> Jones, "Whither SAASS and Its Graduates," 52. AFPC "validates" billets to ensure that the job requirement exists and that the specific billet/duty position requires the stated expertise (i.e., a SAASS graduate).

<sup>18</sup> Jones, "Whither SAASS and Its Graduates," 54.

<sup>19</sup> Jones, "Whither SAASS and Its Graduates," 64.

House Armed Services Committee report on PME recognized this fact, saying SAAS's students (among others) "would have had shared formative military experiences." It recommends placing more officers in top-tier civilian education programs in order to put them "outside of their comfort zones [and] having civilian peers challenge their perspectives, who may have no particular familiarity or experience with the military."<sup>20</sup>

Andrew Krepinevich and Barry Watts note that, "Strategy may be a game anyone can play, but the evidence is strong that very few can play it well."<sup>21</sup> The Air Force's leadership over time has relied on the belief that its officers can play it well enough through the normal career cycle and professional military education. John Shaud, a retired USAF general who currently heads the Air Force Research Institute, also believes that the USAF no longer studies or writes strategy in the purest sense, but deals more with programming and budgeting at the higher staff levels.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to the USAF, the U.S. Army intentionally develops their strategists and identifies them with a career specialty code--FA59. The Army started this functional area in 1997, with the implementation of the Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) XXI, designed to update the Army's personnel development system for the twenty-first century.<sup>23</sup> Yet, as with the USAF, the lamentations of not having strategists in the Army and the need to develop them dates back decades. A 1982 Army War College study identified the persistent calls and requirements for Army strategists, decried the lack of institutional direction and support to codify requirements for such a career field, and provided a plan for developing strategists. The authors

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<sup>20</sup> House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations, *Another Crossroads? Professional Military Education Two Decades After the Goldwater-Nichols Act and the Skelton Panel*, Committee Print 111-4, 48. In my separate interviews with them, Generals Ronald Fogleman and John Shaud agreed with the notion of sending more officers to civilian graduate programs. General John Shaud (USAF, Retired; Director, Air Force Research Institute), interview by the author, 27 October 2010; and General Ronald R. Fogleman to the author, e-mail, 20 October 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Krepinevich and Watts, *Regaining Strategic Competence*, x.

<sup>22</sup> General John Shaud (USAF, Retired; Director, Air Force Research Institute), interview by the author, 27 October 2010.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Army, "Background. OPMS XXI . . . Developing Leaders for the 21st Century," <http://www.army.mil/ADSXXI/backgrou.htm>.

concluded that the Army's deficiency in qualified strategists required a plan and a determined, long-term commitment to develop them, to include resources and time.<sup>24</sup> Twenty years later, the Army has created a formal career specialty, defined "strategists," clearly identified their duties and jobs that require the specialty, and provided career managers for the field.

To the Army, developing strategists provides "the Army with a highly trained cadre specializing in the development and implementation of national strategic plans and policies; theater strategy and campaign planning; and the evolution of concepts and doctrine for employing military forces at the operational and strategic levels of war."<sup>25</sup> The Army outlined four functional competencies for its Strategic Plans and Policy officers: strategic appraisal, strategic and operational planning, interagency integration, and strategic education.<sup>26</sup> The FA59 officers have separate assignment allocations and specific jobs and duties, which include providing assessments and recommendations on topics of national security to senior military and civilian leaders, formulating positions on national security policy and strategy, and teaching operational and strategic planning to support the Army.<sup>27</sup>

The Army looks to fill the FA59 ranks beginning at the senior captain level (seven years in service), but also allows for lateral moves into the FA59 field at points later in an officer's career. While noting that the assignments and developmental opportunities are not specifically sequenced, the FA59 career managers look for critical skill and experiences, as depicted by Figure 1.

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<sup>24</sup> Colonel John P. Herrling and Colonel Thomas R. Tempel, "Education of Military Strategists" (Study Project, U.S. Army War College, 7 June 1982), 16.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Army, "Strategic Plans and Policy: U.S. Army FA59 Home Page," <http://www.fa-59.army.pentagon.mil/Default.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

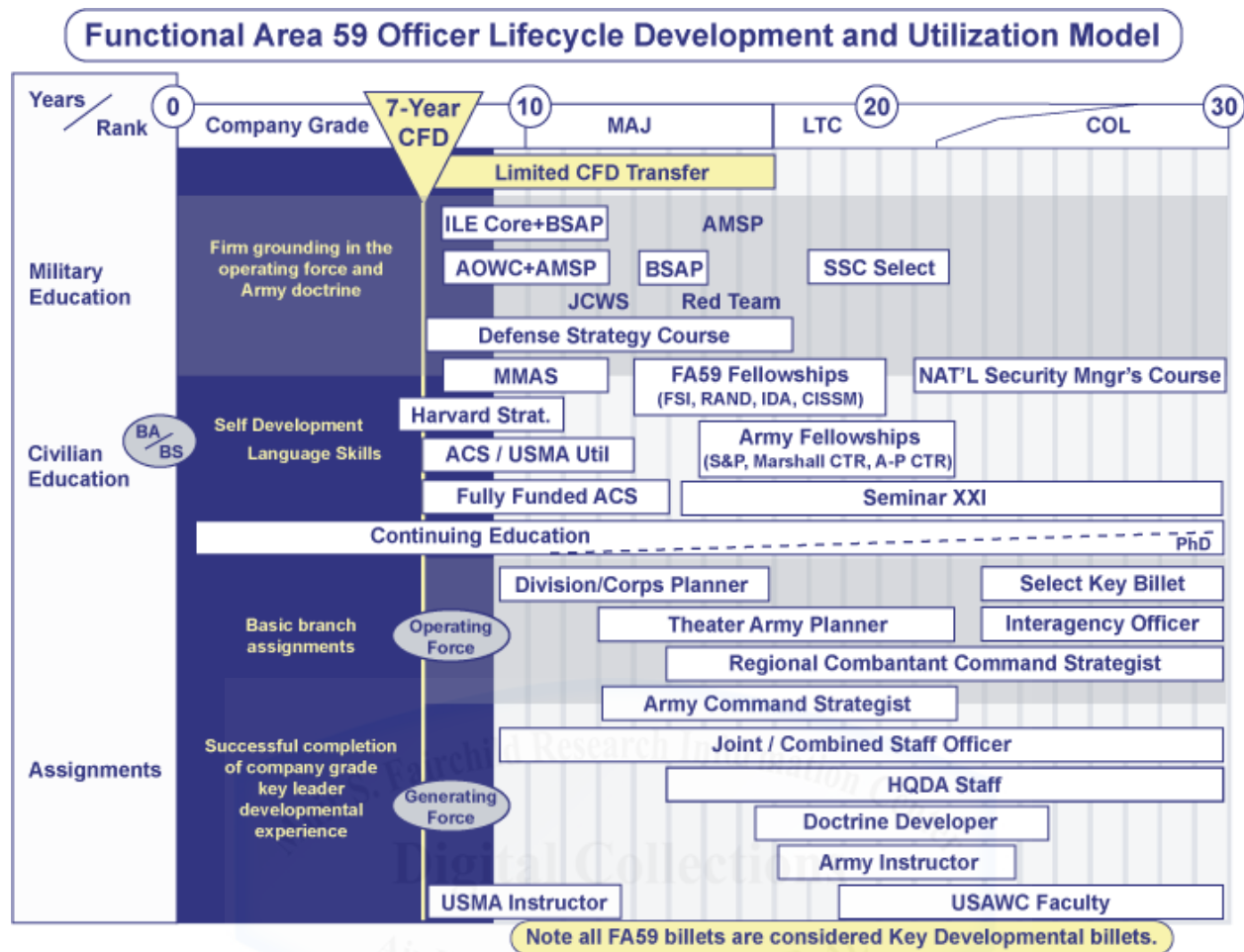


Figure 1: U.S. Army FA59 Officer Lifecycle<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly, the career field managers provide clear information to their officers about promotion opportunities. Only about ten percent will attend a war college in-residence, and only thirty-five percent can expect promotion to colonel at this time, with "no pathway to general officer." However, they are obtaining "key [colonel] billets that may influence potential future promotions."<sup>29</sup> While not a system or a career that currently tracks one for senior leadership positions, the Army is ahead of the Air Force in that it defines what it needs in these officers,

<sup>28</sup> Figure is on the same web area as previous reference, but on the "Career" tab, which links to: <http://www.fa-59.army.pentagon.mil/Positions.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

recognizes the need for these skills, and develops and assigns them to specific billets. The Air Force should adopt a similar stance toward developing strategic plans and policies officers, but also take it several steps beyond.

## **Defining a Strategist**

It seems as though from its beginnings the Air Force recognized the need for educated strategists. However, the service has not formalized the process and simply hopes to create officers who can serve as strategists, prepared only through standard professional military education and their experiences. A large part of the problem lies with defining a strategist.

Standard reference books describe a strategist simply as one who excels at or is an expert in strategy (which itself has a long and contentious history defying an accepted definition).<sup>30</sup> Army Major General Richard Chilcoat described "masters of strategic art" who could combine and integrate three roles performed by the "complete strategist": the strategic leader, the strategic practitioner, and the strategic theorist.<sup>31</sup> Army Lt. Colonel Charles Moore, combining General Chilcoat's description with Army duties, described Army strategists as officers who "provide a strategic perspective on complex problems and help create national and regional strategic guidance . . . [and] are instrumental in the translation of that guidance into actionable plans at the theater-strategic and operational levels of war."<sup>32</sup> Current literature produced by Air Force

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<sup>30</sup> Clausewitz offered a simple definition; see Clausewitz, *On War*, 128. Colin Gray provided a brief survey of the definition of strategy; see Colin Gray, *Making Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17-21. Army Lt. Colonel Charles Moore noted, "A person could grow old collecting definitions of 'strategy' and 'strategic.'" Lt. Colonel Charles P. Moore, "What's the Matter With Being a Strategist (Now)?" *Parameters* XXXIX (Winter 2009-2010), 8.

<sup>31</sup> Major General Richard A. Chilcoat, *Strategic Art: The New Discipline for 21st Century Leaders* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1 October 1995), iii and 6-8 (accessed at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=285>).

<sup>32</sup> Moore, "What's the Matter With Being a Strategist (Now)?", 9.



officers fails to provide a clear definition, but expands upon the need for (undefined) strategists and the cognitive skills needed.<sup>33</sup>

The Curtis E. LeMay Center for Doctrine Development and Education recently examined the need for Air Force strategists and also described a strategist, but did not provide a distinct definition. Major General David Fadok, the LeMay Center commander, in a briefing presented to Air University leaders, described a strategist in four bullet points as: "one who displays a genius for strategy," "someone who plans for the future or plans a way of doing things," "someone with the gifts of mind and temperament that in combination bear on military activity," and "an expert specially trained and educated to devise the plans to bind military action."<sup>34</sup> In a banner-type tag line on one of his briefing slides, Fadok concluded that strategists must be adept at both looking at individual parts and the larger whole of any issue. Like the Army definitions of strategists and other attempts, General Fadok blended elements of different definitions of strategy and functions (ways, means, plans) and he also included a broad category of the skills needed ("gifts of mind and temperament").

Without an accepted definition for a strategist, I propose one more broad than previous ones offered by either the Army or the Air Force. I also believe the definition, even for a military strategist, should not limit itself to include only the use or threatened use of military power. Theorists and writers from Clausewitz to Colin Gray usually include force considerations when defining strategy.<sup>35</sup> Yet in the twenty-first century, effective military strategies and the activities of military forces must consider (and are currently conducting operations) limiting the

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<sup>33</sup> For an example of USAF thinkers focusing upon the skills only, see Bethel et al., "Developing Air Force Strategists," *passim*. The Army definition focused upon the functional aspects of a strategist--what the strategist would do, rather than what they need to be to do the job. See the Army definition, previously mentioned, and at U.S. Army, "Strategic Plans and Policy: U.S. Army FA59 Home Page," <http://www.fa-59.army.pentagon.mil/Default.htm>. For an example of USAF thinkers focusing upon the skills only, see Bethel et al., "Developing Air Force Strategists," *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> Major General David Fadok, "Building Strategists" (briefing), 21 October 2010.

<sup>35</sup> For Gray's and Clausewitz's definition of strategy see Clausewitz, *On War*, 128 and Gray, *Making Strategy*, 17.



direct application of force in order to achieve stated goals.<sup>36</sup> Thus, modifying a broader definition of strategy offered by Andrew Krepinevich and Barry Watts, I propose strategists are people who use their education, experience, and habits of mind to identify, create, or exploit asymmetric advantages to achieve one's own objectives and do so with limited resources, a consideration of all outside constraints--including adversaries or competitors perceptions and actions, and the mental agility to adjust to the inherent unpredictability of human activities.<sup>37</sup> In an effort to devise how the Air Force should specifically find and develop officers with these skills, I propose a dual-track career field.

### **A Dual-Track Strategist Career Field: A Proposal to Meet USAF Strategist Needs**

The USAF still hopes that through normal career development and the military education system that a strategist emerges, but, as related to Air War College students repeatedly, "hope is not a strategy."<sup>38</sup> General Fadok gave the Air Force the second lowest "grade" among the services for cultivating strategists--a D+.<sup>39</sup> Unless strategists are afforded specific assignments and career development opportunities, they likely will never have sufficient time and space to think and develop their ideas, or improve upon that grade. USAF efforts to create strategists seem to center on inter-service/inter-agency exchanges, refined curriculums, and language and

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<sup>36</sup> Mark Clodfelter coined negative objectives as goals "achievable only by *limiting* military force" [emphasis original]. Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), xi.

<sup>37</sup> For the original definition of strategy by Krepinevich and Watts, see Krepinevich and Watts, *Regaining Strategic Competence*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> The quote is one heard often, but not attributed. One specific attribution is to former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani during a 2008 campaign speech, "change is not a destination, just as hope is not a strategy." See <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94254610>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. He gave the other services the following grades: Navy - A-; Army - B; and Marine Corps - D. Fadok gave no criteria for his grades.

cultural training.<sup>40</sup> While these solutions provide some of the necessary pieces, they are not a structured plan.

The key elements in the development of strategists are a top notch civilian education and the time and space to think, develop, and apply their ideas. An Army War College student paper almost thirty years ago proposed the background and requirements for making an "outstanding strategist," which the authors modified from John Collins' 1973 book *Grand Strategy*. In addition to the cognitive skills and personality traits noted by Collins, the Army colonels added the following requirements: broad perspective and world view; military operational and staff experience; and a devotion to "self-education and reflection."<sup>41</sup> The authors noted that the world's great theorists needed time to think and they "produced their greatest works during periods of [personal] stability in an environment undisturbed by daily distractions."<sup>42</sup> While no military officer will ever achieve the true philosopher's state of quiet solitude, the USAF can implement specific plans to build strategists. Without a separate career track that allows and encourages the development of specific skills, the service will find itself decades from now still lamenting the lack of expert strategists.

I propose a two-track system, roughly equivalent to the USAF's International Affairs program, but more tightly managed.<sup>43</sup> The "Command Strategist" will be an officer who will

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<sup>40</sup> See Colonel Pollyana Montgomery, "Building Better Strategists" (Master's Thesis, U.S. Army War College, 15 March 2008), passim. See also, *A Strategic Vision for the Professional Military Education of Officers in the Twenty-First Century*, Report of the Panel on Joint Professional Military Education (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 1995). Barry Watts correctly noted that improved PME is not the only solution and that "only a minority of officers will retain the mental agility" by the time they are ready for generals' stars. Barry D. Watts, *U.S. Combat Training, Operational Art, and Strategic Competence: Problems and Opportunities* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2008), 5.

<sup>41</sup> Herrling and Tempel, "Education of Military Strategists," 11. For Collins' characteristics see John M. Collins, *Grand Strategy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1973), 221-231.

<sup>42</sup> Herrling and Tempel, "Education of Military Strategists," 11.

<sup>43</sup> The International Affairs program includes the Political-Military Affairs Strategist (PAS) and the Regional Affairs Strategist (RAS). I believe the "strategists" moniker is incorrect; and the old term (which the Army still uses) of Foreign Area Officers (FAO) is more correct. As their website states, the programs are designed to build a cadre of officers "with the insight and skills to build effective relationships with global partners." Secretary of the Air Force

have more specific duty and educational assignments than other officers, but will also move in and out of traditional command billets. In addition to allowing the officer to attend specific training to build strategic skills, this track's purpose is two-fold. First, it will allow the officer to remain in-touch with "line-of-the-Air Force" issues and return to command assignments. Second, by returning to command and traditional USAF duties that portend advancement to higher ranks, the officer remains viable for senior leadership positions. My second proposed track, the "Professional Strategist," will take the officer out of a normal Air Force career progression and specifically develop the officer, deeply and broadly, to serve the service and the nation as a senior-level strategist. Assignments will alternate between education--their own and teaching others--and strategy billets.

Both tracks require identification of officers and entry into the tracks at the senior captain level, prior to the O-4 promotion board--at approximately eight years of commissioned service. The most difficult aspect of the new system will be identifying the proper officers. In their study, Krepinevich and Watts stated that the cognitive abilities needed to make a competent strategist are not widespread among the general population, but these abilities likely are developed (or not) by the time people are in their early twenties. Furthermore, they believe that no training or PME, immaterial of the officer's innate intelligence or military experience, will develop the talent for strategic insight. They agree that identifying these rare individuals is not easy but it is necessary to retain our nation's strategic competence.<sup>44</sup> "The problem of selecting competent strategists," they wrote, "is much the same as picking future air-to-air aces based on intelligence tests, educational records, personality traits, or even performance in undergraduate pilot training. We simply do not have very reliable predictors of performance other than waiting

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International Affairs office, "International Affairs Specialists,"  
<http://www.safia.hq.af.mil/internationalaffairsspecialist/index.asp> (accessed 5 December 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Krepinevich and Watts, *Regaining Strategic Competence*, xi, 18-19, and 41.

to see which pilots later excel in actual air-to-air combat."<sup>45</sup> The services must do the best they can to identify qualified people, and then educate and utilize them in the proper positions.

Without a system or test for identifying the perfect candidates, we must use existing USAF selection board methods, but with modifications. As Anna Simons pointed out, sometimes the individuals will stand out, but sometimes it will take a mystical alignment.<sup>46</sup> Officers must volunteer for selection into the tracks, and the officer's senior raters must concur--and not just because the person is smart and a good officer. The senior rater must be the initial quality-control screen and make the sometimes tough decision to tell the officer "no." General Shaud also believes officers who "self-select" will have a predisposition for writing and the type of studies needed to succeed.<sup>47</sup> The selection board, based upon the USAF's Developmental Team concept, should not use commanders, but civilian and military academic professionals from Air University, the Air Force Academy, and senior representatives from the strategy community. The senior rater and the board should screen academic and professional records and select officers with demonstrated abilities to think critically. The board must also look for the following traits: creativity, curiosity, confidence, intellectual flexibility, and a demonstrated ability to collate and assess large amounts of data.<sup>48</sup> The selection board may elect to use a short essay test, given at military testing facilities used for distance learning, with different topics for each yearly exam. Another assessment measure may include one of a number of certified critical thinking tests. The clear desire is to effectively measure, with the means available, the aptitude

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<sup>45</sup> Krepinevich and Watts, *Regaining Strategic Competence*, 40.

<sup>46</sup> Anna Simons, *Got Vision? Unity of Vision in Policy and Strategy: What It Is and Why We Need It* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, July 2010), 24.

<sup>47</sup> General John Shaud (USAF, Retired; Director, Air Force Research Institute), interview by the author, 27 October 2010. General Shaud also noted that due to the "less definitive" strategic environment, critical thinking skills are among the most important; "nobody's got the checklist now" on the enemy and the strategic environment. On the selection and the need for senior officer endorsement honesty, he said "the 'everybody gets an A' mentality does not help."

<sup>48</sup> Bethel et al. outlined the majority of these traits in the article "Developing Air Force Strategists." Others I compiled from a study of other sources on the topic to include, Simons, *Got Vision?* and Mark Moyer, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 8-11.

for innovative strategic thinking, and not select officers as is currently done for PME, based upon often inflated military records.

Selected officers for both tracks will depart the summer following their selection for a civilian masters degree based in the humanities or a social sciences program in war studies or a strategy-related program, all at top-tier civilian universities. This requirement addresses a specific recommendation of the new House Armed Services Committee PME report, "Another Crossroads." The House Subcommittee, in specifically addressing the "most important area" of their study, the cultivation of military strategists, recommended programs in international relations, political science, economics, and history as "core components" of security strategy. Additionally, the Subcommittee report asserted that developing strategists and obtaining this education must come earlier and "could not wait" for war college eligibility.<sup>49</sup> Although the report found that civilian education should not replace PME in all areas, the Air Force already allows "in-residence equivalency" for civilian graduate school programs. In order to fit within an officer's career, the USAF must grant this same equivalency for those selected for this program and sent to 18-24 month graduate schools. The recent Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) report also recommended top civilian graduate schools and indicated they should be part of an updated PME structure.<sup>50</sup> The Air Force should also partner with Harvard and arrange a strategist program, similar to the Army's one-year Harvard program (but with a strategy-related focus, vice a master's degree in public administration).

Both of my proposed strategist tracks have the same initial steps and timing. By the end of the civilian degree program, officers in both should have been selected for promotion to O-4 and

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<sup>49</sup> House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations, *Another Crossroads? Professional Military Education Two Decades After the Goldwater-Nichols Act and the Skelton Panel*, Committee Print 111-4, xiii and 45.

<sup>50</sup> Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, *The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America's National Security Needs in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2010), xv-xvi and 79-80.

near the ten-year point. The career tracks diverge beginning with the initial post-education assignment.

For the Command Strategist Officer (CSO) track, the Air Force should assign the newly-educated major to teach at an appropriate level of military education. These assignments include instructor duty at the USAF Academy, ROTC detachments, Squadron Officer College, Air Command and Staff College, or as a joint officer at one of the other service schools. By teaching they would be spreading their newly-gained knowledge, along with their experience, while learning more themselves, and further refining their writing, research, and thinking skills. Due to the makeup of the schools and their faculties, officers should be given joint-duty credit. The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Independent Panel recommended the joint duty provision for these jobs, and also encouraged making PME faculty duty a requirement for promotion to flag rank.<sup>51</sup> General Shaud noted that the Army bests the Air Force in this area, as teaching to the former is a "duty not to be avoided." He also believes the skills needed for strategists are sharpened by teaching.<sup>52</sup>

Now at the 13-14 year point, the CSO needs to reenter the line-of-the-USAF and obtain command and staff credentials. The first post-PME instructor assignment must be in a command or command-track billet. As an O-4, the most appropriate would likely be Director of Operations, although some majors may command a squadron in some career fields. These assignments keep the officer viable for increased command responsibilities later and keep their main career field bona fides updated. Officers remain in most command and command-preparation jobs only two years, which means the officer could then follow that assignment with one to a combatant command (COCOM) or Joint Staff J-5 duty. The officer should be placed in

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<sup>51</sup> Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, *The QDR in Perspective*, 76.

<sup>52</sup> General John Shaud (USAF, Retired; Director, Air Force Research Institute), interview by the author, 27 October 2010.

a joint billet working strategy issues, and should attend the short Joint and Combined Warfighting School en route, as this earns them the proper joint qualifications necessary for promotion and prepares them for J-5 duties.

With a mix of education, command, and joint strategy duties, the well-rounded CSO should now be an O-5 and ready for squadron command. At this stage, the CSO could also be offered, in lieu of command, the opportunity to switch to the Professional Strategist Track, a move which would be vetted through a selection board with the same selection process noted earlier. The CSOs should be considered not only for squadron command in their primary fields, but also for command positions within PME, with O-5 ROTC billets boarded and counted as command, as well as equivalent positions within the Air Force Academy and Air University.<sup>53</sup> Those not selected for command could serve in Air Staff, Joint Staff, or MAJCOM and COCOM staff billets.

The CSO would now be approaching an O-6 promotion board, and the USAF should assign the officer based upon normal O-5 and primary career field criteria. The top officers should be given command-prep positions (deputy group commands) and this timing also allows selected officers to attend in-residence senior PME. A successful CSO, endowed with a mix of education, command and staff experience, and being a Joint Qualified Officer, should be very competitive for colonel and group command. The officers' assignments are then handled by the Colonel's Group on the Air Staff, and their prospects for general's stars will depend on their performance as colonels.

Instead of the "normal" assignments and command opportunities offered to the Command Strategist, the Professional Strategist Officer's (PSO) career will be spent in assignments that

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<sup>53</sup> The USAF boards and assigns the Air Force Academy Air Officers Commanding (AOC) positions as squadron and group commands.



include additional academic duties and strategist positions. The career track's goal is to produce an officer with unique skills, while also positioning them for senior leadership positions. Recall the two tracks were identical in selection and initial education. The divergence begins at the post-Intermediate Development Education (IDE) equivalency assignment. The PSO should follow school with an immediate assignment to a J-5 position, preferably at a combatant command, but if those are not available, then the Joint Staff. The officer should attend JPME II<sup>54</sup> en route, to ensure that they are prepared for the assignment and granted Joint Qualified Officer status afterwards.

At the 14-15 year point in their careers, the PSO should be sent to a three-year doctoral program. Like the master's program--and in line with the QDR review and the recent HASC PME study--the fields of study should be strategy-related and based in the humanities or social sciences. The PME report found that the services need to send more officers, beyond those required for specific teaching duties, to Ph.D. programs in these fields "in order to build a cadre of strategic thinkers for the operating forces and higher-level staffs."<sup>55</sup> The officer should be an O-5 or O-5-select, and completion of the doctorate should serve as Senior Developmental Education (SDE) equivalency.

Based upon assignment availability and service needs, the next two assignments can be switched in order, but the officer should complete both. In line with the QDR panel's recommendations, officers should take a "sabbatical" assignment in another government agency,

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<sup>54</sup> The Joint and Combined Warfighting School, part of the Joint Forces Staff College, at Norfolk, VA. This school is still required for qualification as a Joint Qualified Officer (JSO--formerly known as Joint Specialty Officer (JSO)).

<sup>55</sup> House Committee on Armed Services, *Another Crossroads?*, 48. A doctoral program would: provide the officer a greater depth of information; add additional levels of critical thinking skills; improve writing skills; and (noted earlier as a need) the time to contemplate and develop ideas. Also, the HASC PME report (quoted earlier, see footnote 19) noted the need for having officers "outside of their comfort zone" and having their ideas challenged by civilians with different perspectives.



a non-government organization, or even in the private sector.<sup>56</sup> The carefully-vetted assignment should take advantage of their education, but the key aspect of this move is using this experience later and offering an opportunity outside of the cookie-cutter template often employed as career development, which fosters "group think" when officers have been trained in similar fashions or with each other. The other assignment, and for the reasons mentioned in the CSO development, should be PME, ROTC, or service academy instructor duties. The service should count these assignments as joint-billet equivalent duties, again in line with the panel reports.

These assignments take the officer to the 20-year point, and the PSO is now positioned for high-level strategist positions on the Joint Staff or on the staffs of the Secretary of Defense or the Air Force. The successful PSO now has a high level of education, has joint-equivalent and instructor duties, and has served at a COCOM and on the highest staffs. They should be competitive for promotion to O-6--and this should be ensured with language similar to the promotion requirements for joint officers as worded in the Goldwaters-Nichols Act; "are expected, as a group, to be promoted at a rate not less than the rate for officers of the same armed force in the same grade and competitive category."<sup>57</sup> Failure to promote these highly-educated and experienced officers at a competitive rate will doom the program, as officers will not volunteer to enter a career field with a lower terminal rank. Former USAF Chief of Staff General Ronald R. Fogleman agreed that such a career path should not be doomed to end at the O-6 or even lower flag ranks. "One would hope," he concluded, "that senior strategists would be assigned as combatant commanders and service chiefs."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, *The QDR in Perspective*, 76.

<sup>57</sup> *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*, Public Law 99-433, 99th Cong., section 662, (accessed online), <https://digitalndulibrary.ndu.edu/u/?goldwater,869>.

<sup>58</sup> General Ronald R. Fogleman to the author, e-mail, 20 October 2010.

## Conclusion

If the USAF remains serious about developing strategists with deep expertise, the service leaders must change how they view promotion, promotion prerequisites (especially the value of traditional command), and create and allow for the unique--but highly qualified--strategist path. Decades of ad hoc attempts to create strategists has resulted in the service relying on enough officers with adequate qualifications to rise to the proper rank and then assigning them to strategist positions on a one-time basis. As one author noted over fourteen years ago: "To be effective in the strategic realm, the military must produce its own strategic thinkers. This demands an institutional commitment to education that includes serious and sustained attention to writing and research. The task is to convince the service that such a commitment, long absent, is in its best interest."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Gregory D. Foster, "Research, Writing, and the Mind of the Strategist," *Joint Force Quarterly* 11 (Spring 1996), 115.

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